



LOST ON THE SUMMIT OF WHITE PASS.

BY CLARENCE PULLEN.

THERE is no theme of drama or romance that appeals more fascinatingly to the average human mind than that of the adventurous search for gold. What other story of mythology can compare in interest with that of the Argonauts in their search for the golden fleece? Jason and his companions setting forth, brave and confident, are types in their purpose and feelings of the gold-seekers in all history, and their experiences symbolize the hard realities that all adventurers have found in their search for golden treasure. Following the shining lure the Argonauts travel from their homes into unknown regions, steadfastly pursuing their course though storm-clouds threaten and waves roll mountain-high. Every anchorage that they find is beset with perils. Fierce wild bulls with brazen hoofs and horns, whose nostrils emit flame and smoke, confront them, and from the dragons' teeth which the voyagers are commanded to sow there suddenly springs up an armored host which Jason must meet and slay. A

dragon guards the tree upon which hangs the golden fleece.

Such is the allegory of the experiences of gold-seekers in all periods and in all lands. In the more lately discovered gold fields in Australia, in California, in South Africa, dangers and difficulties have barred the way to the golden treasure, and like dragons have guarded the hoard when its hiding-place has been found. Land and ocean, mountain steeps and burning sands, are traversed; dangers from miasma, venomous reptiles, wild beasts and hostile savages are risked; hunger, thirst, fatigue, are willingly endured, in the quest of the modern Argonauts. Now in the recent discovery of a vast gold field, the latest, perhaps the richest, that the world has known, a dragon in new and deadly form confronts the treasure-seekers—a specter white and chilling—the Arctic cold, the frozen land of the Klondike.

Alaska, through which lie the paths to the Klondike, is a region in which the last third of the century has seen strange and

striking developments. At the time that the United States bought it of Russia, in 1867, it was known to the world in general only as a green-tinted space on the atlas, marked Russian America, with Sitka, at its northern extremity, designated as the "capital." The characteristics of its native inhabitants, as reported by explorers and whalers, were rather Asiatic than American and the impression of the Orient was not lessened by Baranoff's castle of copper-riveted logs, and the quaint Greek church, with its glittering altar and shrines and magnificent copy of the Moscow madonna and child in gold and silver setting, at

sifted the gravel beds of streams and sank test pits, venturing as far inland as white men at the time could go.

The fortunes of these men varied. Some disappeared in the forest wilds never to be heard of again—killed by wild beasts or Indians, perishing through accident or cold or hunger. None knew the story of their ending—only that they went into the wilderness and did not return. Others came back, hungry, footsore and ragged—some with stories of fair prospects and a buckskin bag or two of gold dust or nuggets to prove their tale; more with nothing else than stray specimens and a hard-luck



CAMP AT THE MOUTH OF DYEA CANON.

Sitka. Slowly the importance of Alaska as an American possession has become evident. The great value of the fur seal fisheries was recognized at an early period after the purchase; then the cod and salmon fisheries, and the limitless supply of building timber on the mainland, were utilized; and accompanying, often preceding, the exploration of our great unknown territory came the prospectors for valuable minerals. Gold and silver are the minerals that the prospector first seeks, and reports that "colors" of gold had been found in Alaska drew men there from the first, who, equipped with picks, shovels and washing pans,

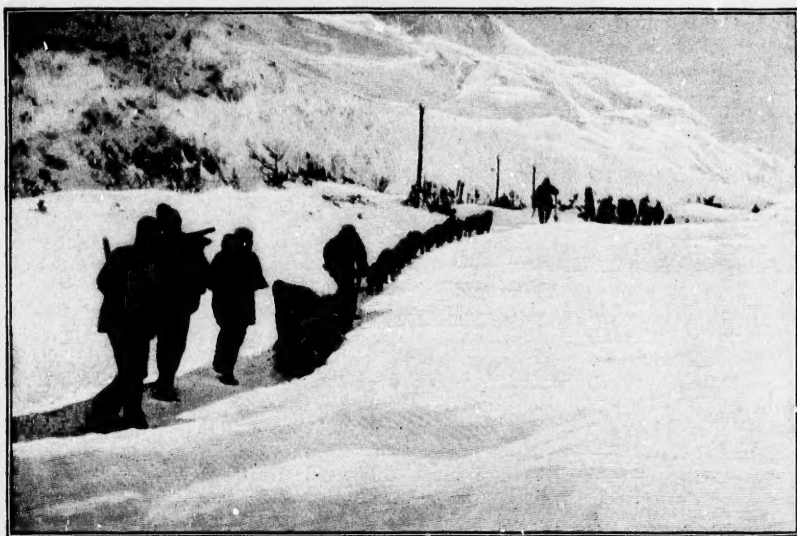
story. But with the inherent hopefulness of their craft, prospectors continued to come, and in the "eighties," after the founding of Juneau, using that place as their outfitting point they made their way to Dyea, thence across Chilkoot Pass and down the chain of tributary lakes and streams to the upper waters of the Yukon. They got more experience than gold, but they were gaining lessons from disaster, and learning the topography of the country and the methods by which gold-seeking there must be conducted. One essential piece of knowledge they acquired through bitter hardship and hunger, the necessity of travel-

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ing and working in parties of considerable numbers, and of taking with them at least a year's supply of clothes and provisions. This obligation of forethought and of working with others to a common end, and the sure weeding out of the weak and thriftless, resulted, through a process of natural selection, in the survival of a class of miners, working about the upper Yukon, who in stalwart physique and honesty of character have not been excelled in the annals of gold-seeking. Over the Dalton and Dyea trails, through the Chilkat and Chilkoot Passes and up the Yukon River, prospectors continued to come until in 1892

twenty-five pounds, potatoes sixty-five dollars a hundred pounds and a villainously concocted whisky fifty cents a drink, the cost of living was high. For the cheapest kind of flannel shirt the miner had to pay sixteen dollars, and for a pair of rubber boots, indispensable to his business, forty dollars. Men owning rich claims went hungry, and scurvy often appeared in the camps toward spring, but the communities on both sides of the boundary were orderly, with few of the personal affrays so common in most mining camps and a complete absence of robbery and theft. Through the cold and snows of the long



THE APPROACH TO CHILKOOT PASS.

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it was estimated that they numbered one thousand, and Circle City on the American, and Dawson on the British Columbian side of the Canadian boundary had assumed the importance of organized mine camps. Yearly the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer came up the Yukon bringing the mail, and miners' supplies, and an accession of fresh members to the camps. By this time there was a regular and considerable output of gold, which the steamer took back mainly in the form of the price paid for supplies. With flour at from sixty to one hundred dollars a sack, dried fruits a dollar a pound, tar eighteen dollars for

Arctic winter, and the heat which generated the plagues of gnats and flies throughout the short summer, the miners toiled and prospected and hoped. Their hope and constancy at last were justified. The good genius who turned everything to gold was the old man McCormick, who hunted and fished along the upper Yukon, the joys of his hyperborean Arcadia enhanced by the companionship of an Indian wife. When in the early summer of 1896 the Yukon miners were toiling through the long hours of daylight to wash out the auriferous earth dug from their claims during the winter, McCormick was not toiling to any great

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AT THE ENTRANCE OF SKAGUAY CANON.

extent, or bothering himself about gold in the earth. With some Indians along to pull his boat and haul his nets, he had gone a-fishing up the river. At the mouth of the Klondike River he spread his nets and then, as the salmon had not begun to run, he took a trip up the stream by way of killing time until the fish should get along. Twenty-five miles from the stream's mouth McCormick, thinking of salmon, came plump upon a gravel placer stuffed with gold, the gold of the Klondike. McCormick did not mind his fishing after this discovery. He staked out a couple of claims, filled his pockets with specimen dust and nuggets and came back, with the news of what he had found, to Circle City. Then the stampede to the new diggings began. Everybody was ready and waiting for just such an announcement and in three days Circle City was a deserted camp. The treasure-seekers were not rushing to disappointment; for once diggings had been discovered that bettered the first accounts received, and of a richness that could not be overrated. The gold was not to be obtained without toil and trouble.

A layer of frozen earth that never thawed extended from the surface of the ground fifteen to twenty-five feet downward, almost or quite to bed-rock, where the richest gold deposits were. But the miners wanted only to know that the gold was there. Of all difficulties that interposed at that stage they made light. Working through the heats of summer days twenty hours in length but all too short for their wishes; blasting the frozen earth with dynamite and gunpowder, or thawing it downward by surface fires; washing out the precious earth in pans and rockers; taking scarcely time to cook and eat their scanty meals, these men lived in a sustained happiness that it is given to few mortals to know—the joy of triumph, the grasping of the golden reward of success in the discovery of a long-sought-for El Dorado.

For the first year the rush to the Klondike comprised only the miners already in the country, and the comparatively few arrivals of men who had started for the upper Yukon in the spring, when, of course, the "find" had not as yet been made. There were claims enough for all. Unknown to the outer

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world, the Klondike miners were washing out earth that yielded sometimes five hundred dollars to the pan, and twenty thousand dollars to the ton, storing the precious dust and nuggets in bags and boxes, in fruit cans, oil cans, teakettles—anything that would serve as a receptacle safe from leakage. Loss by theft was not taken into account in this camp of Midas where gold was less tempting to men's present needs than flour and bacon and potatoes. With the shutting down upon them of the Arctic winter the work of mining did not cease although the miners, with the streams locked in ice, no longer could wash out the gold. They kept on sinking their shafts to bed-rock, laying the valuable earth aside to be washed out in the spring.

It was early in the next July, in 1897, that the riches of the Klondike became known to the world, and the announcement was as dramatically unexpected as the finding of the treasure fields had been. A steamer from the Yukon warped in and was moored at a wharf in San Francisco and it brought as passengers forty unkempt men in tattered clothes, fresh from the

Klondike. They had a story to tell like that of Aladdin and they had brought gold to the value of a half-million dollars in earnest of its truth; and they had taken only a little from the richness of the claims they had left behind. Besides the treasure that they had brought, there was on the steamer a quarter million dollars in Klondike gold belonging to the Alaska Commercial Company.

There was no lack of information and of warning as to what lay before the adventurers who would follow the paths of these successful miners from the Yukon headwaters. Only a limited number could take the long, but safe and easy route, by boat, by way of St. Michaels and the Yukon. The great majority must risk the mountain passage from Dyea and Skaguay, through one of the five passes that, once traversed, led to a comparatively open route by land and water over the five hundred miles of wilderness that intervened between them and the Klondike. Few were rash enough to think of a winter journey there, but many hastened their start so as to get to the Klondike before cold weather set in, and others made all preparations to be at



A PERMANENT WINTER CAMP ON SKAGUAY TRAIL.

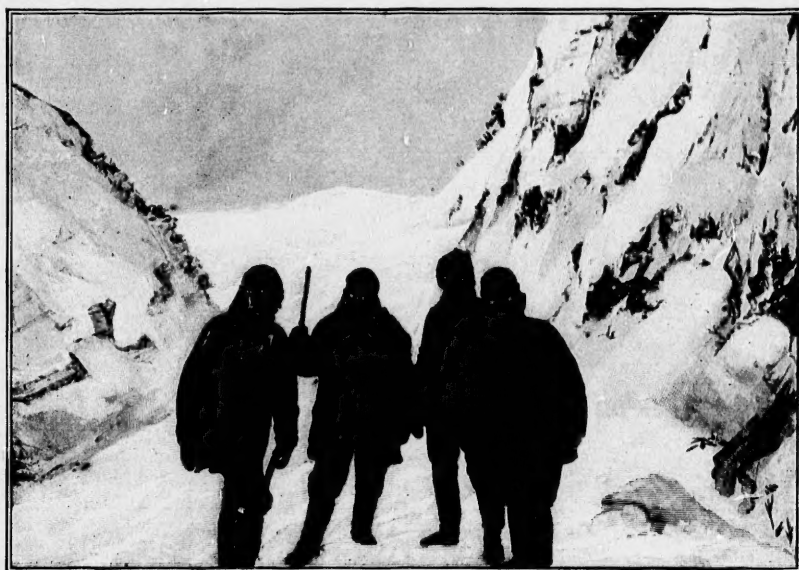
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the nearest point for departure to the gold fields as soon as spring should open. The stories of the Chilkat and Chilkoot Passes have been told and retold, with many illustrations, in the last twelve months. The bowlder-strewn cleft of the Chilkoot, rising twenty-five hundred feet in two miles, a terrible pathway over which unloaded animals can be driven only with the greatest difficulty and men must bear all burdens upon their shoulders, is, as a choice of evils, the preferred route of the emigrants. Some typical scenes—the steep, narrow defile filled with toiling men, and slipping, frightened horses urged on toward the summit; the abandoned outfits and the men and animals fallen out by the way—are familiar to all readers of the current illustrated periodicals. Of the disappointments, homesickness, despair, the weariness and smarting under unfamiliar toils, that the walls of this mountain pass have seen, but little has been told to compare with the reality. With the worst difficulties encountered at the very outset of the journey, and the promise of five hundred miles of wilderness to be traveled beyond, it is little wonder that many of the gold-seekers quit at this point, and that the traders of

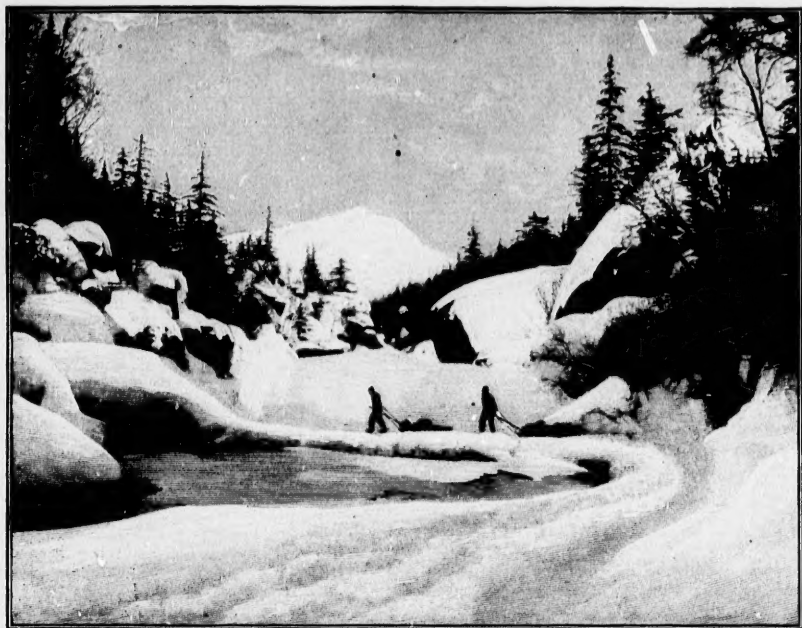
Dyea and Skaguay should be besought by hosts of discouraged prospectors to buy their outfits at half the cost to provide the means of return.

The written history of this pass, so recently exploited to the world, opens with a tragedy. It was here, in 1887, that the miner Williams, who had traveled six hundred miles, from Forty Mile Creek on the Yukon, bearing letters and a bag of gold specimens, perished of hunger and exposure. His guide, a young Indian, succeeded in getting to a trading station, bringing the letters and gold with his story of disaster. In the last year the route through Chilkoot to the Klondike has been marked by similar happenings, some of which have been tragedies on a far greater scale. Of these may be mentioned particularly the disaster that occurred last spring near Crater Lake. Twenty-two men, hauling sleds in single file over the frozen surface of a stream, were engulfed by the breaking of the ice and sunk from sight before the eyes of their comrades, who were powerless to save them. A recent tragedy was that of June last, when sixteen men and women bound for the Klondike were drowned in Lake Lindemann. They had constructed



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CROSSING SKAGUAY RIVER ON AN ICE BRIDGE.

a scow in which to navigate the lake and had embarked upon it with sixteen horses and the entire outfit of the company. At a point in the lake known as Windy Arm the waves demolished the scow, and all on board were lost. In such events as these on the Klondike route there is no time for mourning, or for effort to recover the bodies. If the waves cast them up they are decently but hurriedly buried by the first party that finds them; the names, if known, are scrawled upon a headboard or on a blazed spot on some near-by tree. Survivors hasten on lest disaster overtake them lingering.

Once at the Klondike, they find that there comes with the winter a time that tries men's souls. The twilight gloom of the short day when the sun at noon hangs low above the horizon; the still, deadly, unrelenting cold which, night and day, waits for him who ventures outside the circle of his firelight, ready to bite limb and feature that may chance to be exposed, and to numb to deadness the center of life if the wanderer stray too far beyond the hearth; vague

fears of want and famine arising from the sense of remoteness from civilized communities—all these weigh on the soul of the new-comer, and bring weariness and longings even to the old-timer. To make the interior of his house of logs, chinked with arctic moss, more cheerful, he pastes pictures cut from newspapers, and lithographs from calendars and soap-boxes, against the walls, and he reads and rereads the much-thumbed books and magazines that drift from man to man about the camp. To some in silent moments come memories of wife and child, and to others the thoughts of sweethearts far away. It was an Argonaut of the Klondike that told me the story of Happy Tom's love romance.

"You may call him Tom Murfree if you tell the story after me," he said. "It sounds near enough like and he might not care to be talked about under his real name. He was one of an outfit of a dozen of us who drifted together and stayed together for three years in the upper Yukon—two years at Circle City and a year at Klondike. We all knew that Tom had a sweetheart named Kitty; that she lived in San Fran-

cisco and that it had been agreed between them when he started away for Alaska, that as soon as he made his pile he was to come back and marry her. One day he got a letter from Kitty and when he had read it he sat, holding it before him in his hand, with the look on his face of a man who has just heard his death sentence pronounced. Kitty had thrown him over. She told him that she was tired of waiting, and was going to marry a man whom she could see once in a while, and who could support her. It was a cruel thing, and Tom was so cut up over it that we were all afraid for him for a time. As luck would have it Old

"She's a pretty girl and a good girl if she doesn't belie her picture," I said. 'You're going with the rest of us to Frisco next summer, with more gold than you can carry in a handcart, and leaving a million dollars more in your claim behind you. Why don't you marry the sister while you're there?'

"We said nothing further then, but I could see that he was thinking. We all observed in the course of a day or two after, that his old laugh had come back, and it stayed to the spring. We cleaned up the dirt that we had dug through the winter, and then we took passage on the



PASSING THE SUMMIT OF WHITE PASS.

McCormick came to the camp next day with his story of new diggings and all Circle City got up and moved to the Klondike. We took Tom along with us, and when he saw the gold that was to be had for the digging he brightened up and set to work at his old stroke.

"One day, when Tom and I happened to be alone together in the shack, in overhauling his kit he by accident dropped a photograph to the floor and I picked it up.

"You still keep her picture, I see."

"He looked at the photograph. 'That's not she,' he said. 'It's her—Kitty's—I mean Mrs. Brownlow's—sister.'

first steamer for Frisco. We were a ragged regiment when we landed, but we had the stuff to buy good clothes and we lost no time in getting outfitted for the city. I saw that Tom had put on a frill or two more than the rest of us, and then I lost sight of him for a week. When I saw him again he told me that he had been to see Kitty.

"She married a clerk in a retail clothing store," he said. 'They are keeping house in three rooms. I've seen her sister, and—do you remember the advice you gave me about her?—we are to be married next Thursday morning. I want you to come to the wedding.'